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Title: The Founding of the Guards of Order, Pt. II

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Blackthorn inclined his head. "I have heard the rumors."

"Nystul told me it is no rumor, for he hath received a letter."

"Indeed," Blackthorn said neutrally, not giving an

inch.

"And there are the strange prophecies that are muttered by madmen, and scribed upon graves and columns of stone," Britannia's ruler continued doggedly. "These are troubled times, Blackthorn."

"They are," Blackthorn said, still standing at the door.

Lord British waited for his friend to give an inch; but the dark-clad mage did not.

"So be it," British said grimly. "I toss thee a bone, Blackthorn. Make thy own virtue guard to guard thy virtue of Chaos. Let them wear thy emblem, and we shall earnestly hope they are indeed good and honest men. And let me proclaim with the law tomorrow that thy guards and mine may co-exist, but none may join both; and they may quarrel freely, and yes, even shed blood. And perhaps then shall we see whose virtues stand in a trial of combat."

Blackthorn's eyes narrowed. "Now thou dost indeed speak of raising

armies, my liege. Art  
thou moving the chess  
game to a different  
field? This bodes not well  
for the safety of the  
land..."

"Do not presume on our  
friendship!" Lord British  
said, throwing Lord  
Blackthorn's words back  
at him. "I have said."

Blackthorn nodded once  
curtly, then slammed the  
door behind him. Only  
then did Lord British sag  
into his chair, to trace  
his hands across the  
parchment of the map.

His fingers lingered  
lovingly over the browned  
ink, until they came  
across the desert left by  
his warring with Lord  
Robere, the desert where  
brothers shed each  
other's blood and nothing  
now can grow. The desert  
whence sprang the seed  
of Britannia. And there  
they rested, and the man  
who would rule a troubled  
land sat quiet whilst the  
winter storm raged  
without, and processions  
wended their way to cold  
graveyards.

He did not see, but I did;  
the figure dark and  
glowering, fangs sharp and  
eyes catlike and metallic  
that glinted from without  
the casement, floating  
'round the stony walls: a  
daemon that had listened  
at the window for its  
own reasons. It flapped  
away on mighty wings,  
concealed by the storm,  
carrying its knowledge of  
a rift at the highest  
levels of the Court away  
into the darkness of the  
now-gathering night.

A scribe came knocking  
tentatively at the door,  
and British bade him  
enter. "Take this down to  
the Council," the lord

instructed, handing him  
the new laws after  
making a few notations  
upon the scroll. The lad  
ran off, and soon there  
came from the open door  
the first shouts of  
argument from the  
Council chambers as men  
chose camps and argued  
across a trestle table.

"'Tis war!" some shouted.

"Nay, 'tis peace!" said  
others, and as I sat upon  
the mantel and shivered  
by candlelight and the  
reddish glow of the  
harvest moon, I realized  
that a poor and lonely  
mouse such as I could  
not discern the  
difference.

"Upon a day when snow  
doth fall  
A gathering will form of  
noblemen  
Among them some who  
quarrel still  
Between free will and the  
civil man  
Whilst watched by mice  
and monsters both  
A challenge shall be made  
That breaketh lances and  
severs growth  
And stains fair grass  
with hate  
Someday perhaps shall  
reconcile  
Two men whose hearts  
were once the same  
Till then the world shall  
tremble dire  
And none shall fix the  
blame "